DECEMBER 1997
$3.00/£2.00

MONTHLY REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST MAGAZINE

VOL. 49
7

THE WOMEN WHO ORGANIZED HARVARD

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IMPERIALISM AND NGOs

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MONTHLY REVIEW:
(ISSN 0027 0520) is a publication of Monthly Review Foundation, a non-profit institution. It is published monthly except July and August, when bimonthly, and copyright © 1997, by Monthly Review. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send all address changes (Form 3579) to Monthly Review Foundation, 122 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001. EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS: 122 West 27th Street, New York, NY 10001. Telephone: (212) 691-2555. Fax: (212) 727-3676 Email: mreview@igc.apc.org. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. MR is indexed in the PAIS Bulletin, Historical Abstracts, America: History and Life, Political Science Abstracts, and the Alternative Press Index, P.O. Box 33109, Baltimore, MD 21218, tel.: (410) 243-2470. NEWSSTAND DISTRIBUTION: B.De Boer, Inc., 113 E. Centre Street, Nutley, NJ 07110; Armadillo & Co., 5795 W. Washington Boulevard, Culver City, CA 90232; Small Changes, 3443 Twelfth Avenue West, Seattle, WA 98119; Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London, E9 5LN, England. SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: U.S.: One year $28, students and senior citizens $23; Foreign $36; students and senior citizens $32. Libraries and Institutions: U.S. $48; Foreign $55. Additional Postage: First Class (U.S. and Canada $15); Airmail: Foreign $20.

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

The *New Yorker* dated October 20-27 carries, along with a generous menu of futurology, a sensational article on the past and present. It is entitled "The Return of Karl Marx," by John Cassidy, who is self-identified as an Oxford-educated friend of "a highly intelligent and level-headed Englishman whose career has taken him ... to a big Wall Street investment bank." Visiting with his friend at the latter's Long Island summer home during the early summer, the two discussed the economy and speculated on how long the current financial boom would last.

"To my surprise, he brought up Karl Marx. 'The longer I spend on Wall Street, the more convinced I am that Marx was right,' he said.

(Continued on inside back cover)

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THE WOMEN WHO ORGANIZED HARVARD: A FEMINIST MODEL OF LABOR ORGANIZATION?

by ELLY LEARY and JEAN ALONSO

Balloons transformed Harvard Yard on May 17, 1988, the day the "servants of the university," as workers were originally called, voted on whether to join the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW), an affiliate of AFSCME. "Ballooning" lightened the tension, but Kristine Rondeau, lead union organizer, had a grim warning for her staff: "You did a wonderful job. But we don't have it ... It's very likely we didn't win."[1] In fact, by a slim margin, they did have it. One of the most influential universities in the world had been outsmarted by some of its unknown employees, mostly women.

John Hoerr's book, *We Can't Eat Prestige: The Women Who Organized Harvard*, chronicles the fifteen-year road to the establishment of the HUCTW. Hoerr, with thirty years experience as a journalist specializing in labor issues, presents this complex and extended labor struggle in sophisticated detail. He also knows how to tell a story with style, filled with personal

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Elly Leary, a former assembler at the now-closed GM-Farmingham plant, currently works as a clerical at Boston University where she is Vice President of UAW 2324. Jean Alonso, a retired assembler in a defense plant, is a mental health counselor working in SEIU 509's Direct Care Workers' Union Organizing Campaign in Massachusetts. She is completing a book on the developmental consequences of work life in the defense industry. A earlier version of this article, written by Jean Alonso, appeared in *The Women's Review of Books*, October 1997.

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recollections, Harvard myths, and elegant classical allusions. Like the supportive husbands who organized themselves into the "HUCTW Ladies' Auxiliary," Hoerr is a real partisan of the new model of organizing he explores.

Hoerr's story focuses on Kris Rondeau who, raised in a small Massachusetts company mill town, was delighted to land a post-college job as lab assistant at Harvard Medical School in 1976, and wished the union sympathizers there would leave her alone. "I was afraid," she tells Hoerr. "I thought that unions were just filled with conflict, and the idea of being in one filled me with conflict"(22). The kind of campaign the Harvard organizers developed was one that could speak to and recruit women just like Kris. It has been championed as "the feminist model of organizing."

The "Feminist" Model

The Harvard drive is fascinating because it illustrates several questions at the heart of the labor movement today. First, what happens when the "different voice" of women's relations predominates in a major workplace struggle? HUCTW's organizing mode, used in the past by men as well as women, is especially compatible with women's relations. How does it conflict with current methods of contending for power? What light does it shed on labor's struggle to rebuild organizations that empower workers? Since *We Can't Eat Prestige* hit the bookshelves, Rondeau has successfully concluded another eight-year drive, this time at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. The stunning 63 percent vote should caution anyone against dismissing their ideas.

Second, the Harvard contract is a model of non-adversarial relations. Are the conflicting class interests that shaped the adversarial labor relations of the last 100-plus years less important now—dwarfed by global competition or blurred in the service sector? Poll after poll indicates that workers, no matter what kind of job they do, want more say and control over what happens at work. Did the industrial relations devised by the Harvard agreement provide for this dream? Or are there pitfalls in the cooperative experiments adopted

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there? These are real questions for labor activists who are confronted with cooperative experiments everyday.

The drive, begun at the Harvard Medical School in 1973, has its roots in the women's movement, which Hoerr illustrates through many anecdotes. In one, Karen Nussbaum, then a secretary at the Harvard School of Education, handed her boss a list of what women at the time ironically called "trivial concerns"—dignity in the workplace, job descriptions that precluded personal service for the boss like getting coffee, opportunities for advancement, and, most importantly, participation in decisions about how work was to be organized. In another, Leslie Sullivan, lead organizer at the Medical School, joined an alliance with faculty women, the Harvard Medical Area Women's Group. Alliances between working class women and professional women have had an uneven history, and this one fell apart. Hoerr tells us that Sullivan came to see that "if everybody's priorities were tossed into one big pot containing all women's issues, the workers' heavy proletarian demands would sink to the bottom while the professionals' issues—floating on top like pretty sprouts and garnishes—would attract attention." (38-9)

A 1984 National Labor Relations Board ruling in favor of Harvard (who had vigorously contested the drive) forced the campaign to go university-wide. By now Rondeau had assumed leadership (she had become an "Undisputed Leader") and her vision of unionism was firmly stamped on the drive—one that differed significantly from the dominant model. This model, consolidated following the Second World War in the rise of business unionism, typically sends staff organizers (in the beginning mostly white men, but now increasingly women and people of color also) to a workplace to conduct a short, passionate, challenging campaign to awaken the workers to their exploitation and their smoldering desire to fight back and take the boss down. Because management's anti-union campaigns have exploded in both their virulence and sophistication (rank-and-file activists are fired in one out of every four campaigns), there is tremendous pressure on the staff to get it all done quickly (from initial

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contact to the start of contract negotiations) before the boss can get the anti-union campaign off the ground. If this (often called a "blitz" where the time table is really compressed) doesn't produce a win, staffers move on, too often leaving the in-house committee out on a limb.

At Harvard, however, not only did the campaign take fifteen years (undoubtedly an expensive effort) but it was driven by members-turned-organizers who adamantly refused to hook up with any union pushing the dominant model. (This refusal to let outsiders run the show in the traditional way created some nasty tensions and intra-union struggle between HUCTW and the UAW, District 65 and AFSCME, all of which Hoerr details). The organizers knew their constituency, and the methods they developed worked. "It's the social thing!" complained UAW Regional Director Ted Barrett. "In the UAW we'd convene a meeting in a hall and tell people why they ought to join a union. At Harvard they'd go to someone's house and have coffee and talk about it." (177)

Indeed, the heart and soul of the campaign were these "one on ones." Instead of relying on leaflets and big meetings, Harvard organizers persistently met with co-workers, usually at work or lunch. These meetings set out to establish beneath-the-surface supportive networks which sustained people through the long drive and built consensus around what organizers determined to be the principal issue: that this highly educated support work force deserved to have dignity and a place at Harvard's table.

Rondeau was not interested in angry toe-to-toe matches with management. "I think anger is the enemy of union organizing," she told Hoerr. "It's the union's responsibility to create an environment in which you can be part of a union and believe in self-representation and worker's voice without being mean, without being aggressive, without being merely oppositional." (128) While in our experience as organizers, ruling out anger at management is hard to imagine, at Harvard it apparently worked. Harvard certainly did mount an anti-union campaign, but HUCTW met Harvard's anti-unionism with patience, nonviolence and preparatory sessions for

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the employees. Harvard, in its hubris, was fooled by this quiet networking. As Anne Taylor, Director of Harvard's anti-union campaign, later explained:

> [When Rondeau's group split from the UAW] we thought we wouldn't hear from the unions for years. By the time we were aware something was going on, they were unbeatable ... Kris understood intuitively what the people were hungering for and nurtured it. The approach was conflict averse, a much more typical way for women. They want to be in relationships rather than putting up their dukes. (211)

The hallmark of the HUCTW "feminine model" is their union contract which is an unfettered philosophical statement for non-adversarial, "partnership" labor relations. The preamble to the first contract states that the "support staff represented by *HUCTW* [are] a valued and essential participant in the cooperative process" of "governing" Harvard. (227) The agreement provided for personnel problem-solving through joint committees of union and management (Local Problem Solving Teams), throwing out the bedrock of workers' protection in most contracts—the grievance and arbitration procedures and job specifications. It emphasized self-representation in disputes, recognizing the abilities of the members and challenging them to develop these. By all accounts this process has been successful and empowering.

Contradictions in the Non-adversarial Model

The innovative structures included Joint Councils at departmental levels for participation in policy-making, led by a university-wide "UJC." While these arrangements and HUCTW's practice of ongoing organizing of members resulted in an impressive 10 percent of members involved and active (compared to 1 or 2 percent in most unions), the Joint Councils are not without problems. And these problems reveal the contradictory nature of non-adversarial relations. The contract contained no language that would give the joint policy-making bodies the power to negotiate and enforce binding changes. They remained consultative. In practice this means that workers are totally dependent on management's "goodwill" to get things done. As HUCTW's fight over health

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care coverage for part-time workers demonstrated, the only decisions that get implemented are those that management is willing to do in the first place. Another serious problem is that the UJC left intact the tradition of departmental decision-making autonomy. "If management in some units chose not to engage in 'joint discussion'," Hoerr comments, "the workers would have no voice." (227) This too has come about, as the new administration of Rudenstein has left it up to departmental deans whether to participate in the JCs. Most have opted out of the time-consuming policy discussions with clerical workers. "We've been unsuccessful in finding partners in a decentralized university, ... [but] we won't stop trying," Rondeau told Hoerr. (262)

Nor should the particularities of the Harvard situation be overlooked. Hoerr is right to emphasize that the innovative contract was equally a product of Harvard's President Derek Bok and Professors Emeriti John Dunlop and James Healy. All three had distinguished academic careers in labor relations, principally selling unions to corporate America. All three were very interested in non-adversarial experiments. One could argue that the Harvard trio saw in HUCTW's non-adversarial approach a chance to develop a sophisticated model of union containment based on giving the illusion of power sharing (by letting workers have input in narrow operational issues), but keeping off-limits the University's most vital matters—its $11 billion endowment and decisions on capital expenditures.

Other questions and comments occur to us which were not part of the analysis of *We Can't Eat Prestige.*

It is telling and ironic that both Hoerr and HUCTW leaders see their "feminist" model as breaking new ground. Indeed it was doing so in that period. But it had historic precedents. One of the consequences of labor's purging of the left in the 1950s, and the subsequent "devil's pact" with capital, was that by the early 1980s labor leaders like the UAW's Ted Barrett were completely out of touch with labor history as well as with the social movements of their own period, in this case the women's movement.

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The history of earlier organizing in the auto industry (from the teens to the Second World War) is a virtual manual on one-on-one organizing like HUCTW's. Open talk on the shop floor about unions was a sure recipe for getting fired and blacklisted. Even small meetings in someone's basement with the shades drawn and the lights off were risky since company spies were everywhere. Ten years of grassroots basebuilding, which like HUCTW's created beneath-the-surface networks that painfully accumulated a "mass" and made connections between employees in different sections of a workplace, paid off in the strength to carry off the famous Flint sit-down. Many of us who have spent time in auto and other basic industry can attest that if the "blitz" method had been tried in the 1930s, we'd still be waiting for unionization. Those of us currently organizing in human services have also had little luck with the "blitz" and more with slower network building.

It is worth noting that there appears to be little evidence that the HUCTW "feminist model" has been taken outside the workplace and brought back to the women's movement which desperately needs to make itself relevant to nonprofessional working women.

HUCTW's emphasis on dignity and self-representation without the benefit of a grievance procedure (or even contracts) also had precedents. The IWW didn't believe in contracts at all. The one page "contract" that ended the Flint sit-down had nothing about wages or working conditions. Its sole focus was dignity and self-representation—workers had a right to join a union and the boss had to deal with the collective voice of the employees. Before the union movement limited rank-and-file participation to complex, anger-channelling grievance procedures (consolidated by 1948) workers for years "problem-solved" by confronting their boss in on-the-spot meetings. Militant rank-and-filers choose this avenue now, ignoring the union rules. The group making the most headway in organizing the South, the Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), confronts the boss in this way even when they have not yet won union recognition, often summoning community support in these confronta-

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tions. They also accept the need for lengthy campaigns, responding to this current necessity by devising a new form—"non-majority unionism" in which you act like a union (newsletters, paying dues, campaigns, and settling members' problems) even before the majority has voted and a contract is in place. Like the Black Workers for Justice, HUCTW is distinguished by their ability to reframe issues and methods, and to construct a culture that emphasizes democratic process and self-representation.

Maintaining democratic process and union strength in the face of divisions of opinion, individualism and corporate attacks is not easy. HUCTW has tried something different with its union structure. There are no regular legislative meetings of the entire membership. Instead, networks of volunteer committees, an invitation-only kitchen cabinet and district meetings discuss and plan union policy and activities. These bodies make recommendations to the elected Executive Board, which sifts through the input before making final decisions. While Hoerr is right to underscore HUCTW's commitment to process, unfortunately he does not explore the downside of the union's informal processes. By not having regular legislative meetings of the entire membership, HUCTW not only deprives itself of building a sense of the collective, but can effectively squash "other" voices, as some HUCTW members have charged.

Finally, there is the question of non-adversarial relations, a major question for unions both traditional and nontraditional. The Harvard model is still promoted in some circles, particularly in the service sector, as the most advanced form of labor relations. Other campaigns sometimes try to win management neutrality before organizing the rank and file by dangling the carrot of non-adversarialism. Both Hoerr and Rondeau were adherents of the "success" of jointness programs in the automobile industry.(253) But an important body of literature detailing these workers' experiences testifies that in reality these programs are disingenuous agreements which are carefully crafted instruments to disarm and dismantle the union while engaging in a good old-fashioned

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speed-up. Many of us organizers face management-created "joint" bodies that give workers only meaningless advisory capacity and are intended to obviate the need for unions. Management's enthusiasm for such partnership schemes is clear in their unsuccessful attempt to convince Congress to pass the TEAM Act.

For too long the labor movement has ignored issues of human rights, development, and empowerment at work—the bread and roses demands for quality of life for workers. For too long, also, it has side-stepped the ultimate question: can the balance of power between the working class and capital be changed without directly challenging capitalism, particularly its market-driven neoliberalism and the essential role that racism and gender inequality play in its economy? We must deal with these questions, and with the need to reform union structures to address capitalism's current strategy for restructuring—decentralization of its operations but concentration of its power at the core.

As the labor movement struggles to figure out what shape should rise from its ashes, guidance is urgently needed from real data about workers' campaigns and experiences. In the face of these challenges, *We Can't Eat Prestige* is essential reading. It's food for thought and the soul!

NOTES

1. John Hoerr, *We Can't Eat Prestige: The Women Who Organized Harvard* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997) 256pp., $29.95 cloth.

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IMPERIALISM AND NGOs IN LATIN AMERICA

by JAMES PETRAS

By the early 1980s the more perceptive sectors of the neoliberal ruling classes realized that their policies were polarizing the society and provoking large-scale social discontent. Neoliberal politicians began to finance and promote a *parallel* strategy "from below," the promotion of "grassroots" organization with an "anti-statist" ideology to intervene among potentially conflictory classes, to create a "social cushion." These organizations were financially dependent on neoliberal sources and were directly involved in competing with socio-political movements for the allegiance of local leaders and activist communities. By the 1990s these organizations, described as "nongovernmental," numbered in the thousands and were receiving close to four billion dollars world-wide.

Neoliberalism and the NGOs

The confusion concerning the political character of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) stems from their earlier history in the 1970s during the days of the dictatorships. In this period they were active in providing humanitarian support to the victims of the military dictatorship and

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denouncing human rights violations. The NGOs supported "soup kitchens" which allowed victimized families to survive the first wave of shock treatments administered by the neoliberal dictatorships. This period created a favorable image of NGOs even among the left. They were considered part of the "progressive camp."

Even then, however, the limits of the NGOs were evident. While they attacked the human rights violations of local dictatorships, they rarely denounced the U.S. and European patrons who financed and advised them. Nor was there a serious effort to link the neoliberal economic policies and human rights violations to the new turn in the imperialist system. Obviously the external sources of funding limited the sphere of criticism and human rights action.

As opposition to neoliberalism grew in the early 1980s, the U.S. and European governments and the World Bank increased their funding of NGOs. There is a direct relation between the growth of social movements challenging the neoliberal model and the effort to subvert them by creating alternative forms of social action through the NGOs. The basic point of convergence between the NGOs and the World Bank was their common opposition to "statism." On the surface the NGOs criticized the state from a "left" perspective defending civil society, while the right did so in the name of the market. In reality, however, the World Bank, the neoliberal regimes, and western foundations co-opted and encouraged the NGOs to undermine the national welfare state by providing social services to compensate the victims of the multinational corporations (MNCs). In other words, as the neoliberal regimes at the top devastated communities by inundating the country with cheap imports, extracting external debt payment, abolishing labor legislation, and creating a growing mass of low-paid and unemployed workers, the NGOs were funded to provide "self-help" projects, "popular education," and job training, to temporarily absorb small groups of poor, to co-opt local leaders, and to undermine anti-system struggles.

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The NGOs became the "community face" of neoliberalism, intimately related to those at the top and complementing their destructive work with local projects. In effect the neoliberals organized a "pincer" operation or dual strategy. Unfortunately many on the left focused only on "neoliberalism" from above and the outside (International Monetary Fund, World Bank) and not on neoliberalism from below (NGOs, micro-enterprises). A major reason for this oversight was the conversion of many ex-Marxists to the NGO formula and practice. *Anti-Statism was the ideological transit ticket* from class politics to "community development," from Marxism to the NGOs.

Typically, NGO ideologues counterpose "state" power to "local" power. State power is, they argue, distant from its citizens, autonomous, and arbitrary, and it tends to develop interests different from and opposed to those of its citizens, while local power is necessarily closer and more responsive to the people. But apart from historical cases where the reverse has also been true, this leaves out the essential relation *between* state and local power—the simple truth that state power wielded by a dominant, exploiting class will undermine progressive local initiatives, while that same power in the hands of progressive forces can reinforce such initiatives.

The counterposition of state and local power has been used to justify the role of NGOs as brokers between local organizations, neoliberal foreign donors (World Bank, Europe, or the United States) and the local free market regimes. But the effect is to strengthen neoliberal regimes by severing the link between local struggles and organizations and national/international political movements. The emphasis on "local activity" serves the neoliberal regimes since it allows its foreign and domestic backers to dominate macro-socio-economic policy and to channel most of the state's resources toward subsidies for export capitalists and financial institutions.

So while the neoliberals were transferring lucrative state properties to the private rich, the NGOs were *not* part of the trade union resistance. On the contrary they were active in

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local private projects, promoting the private enterprise discourse (self-help) in the local communities by focusing on micro-enterprises. The NGOs built ideological bridges between the small scale capitalists and the monopolies benefitting from privatization—all in the name of "anti-statism" and the building of civil societies. While the rich accumulated vast financial empires from the privatization, the NGO middle class professionals got small sums to finance offices, transportation, and small-scale economic activity.

The important political point is that the NGOs *depoliticized* sectors of the population, undermined their commitment to public employees, and co-opted potential leaders in small projects. NGOs abstain from public school teacher struggles, as the neoliberal regimes attack public education and public educators. Rarely if ever do NGOs support the strikes and protests against low wages and budget cuts. Since their educational funding comes from the neoliberal governments, they avoid solidarity with public educators in struggle. In practice, "non-governmental" translates into anti-public-spending activities, freeing the bulk of funds for neoliberals to subsidize export capitalists while small sums trickle from the government to NGOs.

In reality non-governmental organizations are *not* non-governmental. They receive funds from overseas governments or work as private subcontractors of local governments. Frequently they openly collaborate with governmental agencies at home or overseas. This "subcontracting" undermines professionals with fixed contracts, replacing them with contingent professionals. The NGOs cannot provide the long-term comprehensive programs that the welfare state can furnish. Instead they provide limited services to narrow groups of communities. More importantly, their programs are not accountable to the local people but to overseas donors. In that sense NGOs undermine democracy by *taking social programs out of the hands of the local people* and their elected officials to create dependence on non-elected, overseas officials and their locally anointed officials.

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NGOs shift people's attention and struggles away from the national budget and toward self-exploitation to secure local social services. This allows the neoliberals to cut social budgets and transfer state funds to subsidize bad debts of private banks, and provide loans to exporters. Self exploitation (self-help) means that, in addition to paying taxes to the state and not getting anything in return, working people have to work extra hours with marginal resources, and expend scarce energies to obtain services that the bourgeoisie continues to receive from the state. More fundamentally, the NGO ideology of "private voluntaristic activity" undermines the sense of the "public": the idea that the government has an *obligation* to look after its citizens and provide them with life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that the political responsibility of the state is essential for the well-being of citizens. Against this notion of public responsibility, the NGOs foster the neoliberal idea of private responsibility for social problems and the importance of private resources to solve these problems. In effect they impose a double burden on the poor who continue to pay taxes to finance the neoliberal state to serve the rich, but are left with private self-exploitation to take care of their own needs.

NGOs and Socio-political Movements

NGOs emphasize projects, not movements; they "mobilize" people to produce at the margins but not to struggle to control the basic means of production and wealth; they focus on technical financial assistance of projects, not on structural conditions that shape the everyday lives of people. The NGOs co-opt the language of the left: "popular power," "empowerment," "gender equality," "sustainable development," "bottom-up leadership." The problem is that this language is linked to a framework of collaboration with donors and government agencies that subordinate practical activity to nonconfrontational politics. The local nature of NGO activity means that "empowerment" never goes beyond influencing small areas of social life, with limited resources, and within the

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conditions permitted by the neoliberal state and macro-economy.

The NGOs and their post-Marxist professional staff directly compete with the socio-political movements for influence among the poor, women, and the racially excluded. Their ideology and practice diverts attention from the sources and solutions of poverty (looking downward and inward instead of upward and outward). To speak of *micro-enterprises,* instead of the elimination of exploitation by the overseas banks, as the solution, is based on the notion that the problem is one of individual initiative rather than the transference of income overseas. The NGO's aid affects small sectors of the population, setting up competition between communities for scarce resources, generating insidious distinctions and inter- and intra-community rivalries, thus undermining class solidarity. The same is true among the professionals: each sets up its NGO to solicit overseas funds. They compete by presenting proposals more congenial to the overseas donors, while claiming to speak for their followers.

The net effect is a proliferation of NGOs that fragment poor communities into sectoral and sub-sectoral groupings unable to see the larger social picture that afflicts them and even less able to unite in struggle against the system. Recent experience also demonstrates that foreign donors finance projects during "crises"—political and social challenges to the status quo. Once the movements have ebbed they shift funding to NGO-style "collaboration," fitting the NGO projects into the neoliberal agenda. Economic development compatible with the "free market" rather than social organization for social change becomes the dominant item on the funding agenda.

The structure and nature of NGOs, with their "apolitical" posture and their focus on self-help, depoliticizes and demobilizes the poor. They reinforce the electoral processes encouraged by the neoliberal parties and mass media. Political education about the nature of imperialism, and the class basis of neoliberalism, the class struggle between exporters and

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temporary workers, are avoided. Instead the NGOs discuss "the excluded," the "powerless," "extreme poverty," "gender or racial discrimination," without moving beyond the superficial symptom to the social system that produces these conditions. Incorporating the poor into the neoliberal economy through purely "private voluntary action," the NGOs create a political world where the *appearance* of solidarity and social action cloaks a conservative conformity with the international and national structure of power.

It is no coincidence that as NGOs have become dominant in certain regions, independent class political action has declined, and neoliberalism goes uncontested. The bottom line is that the growth of NGOs coincides with increased funding under neoliberalism and the deepening of poverty everywhere. Despite the claims of many local successes, the overall power of neoliberalism stands unchallenged and the NGOs increasingly search for niches in the interstices of power.

The problem of formulating alternatives has been hindered in another way too. Many of the former leaders of guerrilla and social movements, trade union and popular women's organizations have been co-opted by the NGOs. Some have undoubtedly been attracted by the hope—or the illusion—that this might give them access to levers of power which would allow them to do some good. But in any case, the offer is tempting: higher pay (occasionally in hard currency), prestige and recognition by overseas donors, overseas conferences and networks, office staff, and relative security from repression. In contrast, the socio-political movements offer few material benefits but greater respect and independence and, more importantly, the freedom to challenge the political and economic system. The NGOs and their overseas banking supporters (Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank) publish newsletters featuring success stories of micro-enterprises and other self-help projects—without mentioning the high rates of failure as popular consumption declines, low-priced imports flood the market, and interest rates spiral, as in Mexico today.

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Even the "successes" affect only a small fraction of the total poor and succeed only to the degree that others cannot enter the same market. The propaganda value of individual micro-enterprise success, however, is important in fostering the illusion that neoliberalism is a popular phenomenon. The frequent violent mass outbursts that take place in regions of micro-enterprise promotion suggests that the ideology is not hegemonic and the NGOs have not yet displaced independent class movements.

Finally NGOs foster a new type of cultural and economic colonialism and dependency. Projects are designed, or at least approved, based on the "guidelines" and priorities of the imperial centers and their institutions. They are administered and "sold" to communities. Evaluations are done by and for the imperial institutions. Shifts of funding priorities or bad evaluations result in the dumping of groups, communities, farms, and co-operatives. Everything and everybody is increasingly disciplined to comply with the donors and project evaluators' demands. The new viceroys supervise and ensure conformity with the goals, values, and ideologies of the donor as well as the proper use of funds. Where "successes" occur they are heavily dependent on continued outside support, without which they could collapse.

In many ways the hierarchical structures and the forms of transmission of "aid" and "training" resemble nineteenth-century charity, and the promoters are not very different from Christian missionaries. The NGOs emphasize "self-help" in attacking "paternalism and dependence" on the state. In this competition among NGOs to capture the victims of neoliberals, they receive important subsidies from their counterparts in Europe and the United States. The self-help ideology emphasizes the replacement of public employees by volunteers, and upwardly mobile professionals contracted on a temporary basis. The basic philosophy of the NGO intellectuals is to transform "solidarity" into collaboration and subordination to the macro-economy of neoliberalism, by focusing attention *away from* state resources of the wealthy classes toward *self-exploitation of the poor.*

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But, while the mass of NGOs are increasingly instruments of neoliberalism, there is a small minority which attempt to develop an alternative strategy that is supportive of anti-imperialist and class politics. None of them receive funds from the World Bank, European, or U.S. governmental agencies. They support efforts to link local power to struggles for state power. They link local projects to national socio-political movements: occupying large landed estates, defending public property and national ownership against multinationals. They provide political solidarity to social movements involved in struggles to expropriate land. They support women's struggles linked to class perspectives. They recognize the importance of politics in defining local and immediate struggles. They believe that local organizations should fight at the national level and that national leaders must be accountable to local activists.

Some Examples

Let us examine some examples of the role of NGOs and their relation to neoliberalism and imperialism in specific countries:

Bolivia

In 1985 the Bolivian government launched its New Economic Policy (NEP) by decree: freezing wages for four months while inflation raged at a 15,000 percent annual rate. The NEP annulled all price controls and reduced or ended food and fuel subsidies. It also laid the basis for the privatization of most state enterprises and the firing of public-sector employees. Massive cutbacks in health and education programs eliminated most public services. These structural adjustment policies (SAP) were designed and dictated by the World Bank and the IMF and approved by the U.S. and European governments and banks. The number of poverty stricken Bolivians grew geometrically. Prolonged general strikes and violent confrontations followed. In response the World Bank, European, and U.S. governments provided massive aid to fund a "poverty alleviation program." Most of the money was directed to a

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Bolivian government agency, the Emergency Social Fund (ESF), which channeled funds to the NGOs to implement its program. The funds were not insignificant: in 1990 foreign aid totalled $738 million.

The number of NGOs in Bolivia grew rapidly in response to international funding: prior to 1980 there were 100 NGOs; by 1992 there were 530 and growing. Almost all the NGOs are directed toward addressing social problems created by the World Bank and the Bolivian government's free market policies, which the dismantled state institutions no longer can deal with. Of the tens of millions allocated to the NGOs, only 15 to 20 percent reached the poor. The rest was siphoned off to pay administrative costs and professional salaries. The Bolivian NGOs functioned as appendages of the state and served to consolidate its power. The absolute levels of poverty stayed the same and the long-term structural causes—the neoliberal policies—were cushioned by the NGOs. While not solving the poverty problem, the NGO-administered poverty programs strengthened the regime and weakened opposition to the SAP. The NGOs, with their big budgets, exploited vulnerable groups and were able to convince some leaders of the opposition that they could benefit from working with the government. According to one observer, commenting on the NGO role in the "poverty program": "If this (NGO programs) did not create direct support, it at least reduced potential opposition to the government and its program."

When the public school teachers of La Paz went on strike to protest $50-a-month wages and crowded classrooms, the NGOs ignored it; when cholera and yellow fever epidemics raged in the countryside, the NGO self-help programs were helpless where a comprehensive public health program would have been successful in preventing them. The NGOs did absorb many of Bolivia's former leftist intellectuals and turned them into apologists for the neoliberal system. Their seminars about "civil society" and "globalization" obscured the fact that the worst exploiters (the private mine owners, new rich agro-exporters, and high paid consultants) were members of "civil

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society" and that the SAP was an imperial design to open the country's mineral resources to unregulated pillage.

Chile

In Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship in 1973-1989, the NGOs played an important role denouncing human rights violations, preparing studies critical of the neoliberal model and sustaining soup kitchens and other poverty programs. Their numbers multiplied with the advent of the massive popular struggles between 1982 and 1986 that threatened to overthrow the dictatorship. To the extent that they expressed an ideology, it was oriented toward "democracy" and "development with equity." Of the close to two hundred NGOs, fewer than five provided a clear critical analysis and exposition of the links between U.S. imperialism and the dictatorship, the ties between World Bank funded free market policies and the 47 percent level of poverty.

In July of 1986 there was a successful general strike—a guerrilla group almost succeeded in killing Pinochet—and the United States sent a representative (Gelbard) to broker an electoral transition between the more conservative sectors of the opposition and Pinochet. An electoral calendar was established, a plebiscite was organized, and the electoral parties re-emerged. An alliance between Christian Democrats and Socialists was forged and eventually won the plebiscite, ending Pinochet's rule (but not his command of the armed forces and secret police); this alliance subsequently won the presidency.

The social movements which played a vital role in ending the dictatorships were marginalized. The NGOs turned from supporting the movements to collaborating with the government. The Socialist and Christian Democratic NGO professionals became government ministers. From critics of Pinochet's free market policies they became its celebrants. Former President of CIEPLAN (a major research institute) Alejandro Foxley publicly promised to continue managing the macro-economic indicators in the same fashion as Pinochet's minister. The NGOs were in-

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structed by their foreign donors to end their support for independent grassroots movements and to collaborate with the new civilian neoliberal regime. Sur Profesionales, one of the best known research NGOs, carried out research on the "propensity for violence" in the shantytowns—information that was useful to the police and the new regime in repressing independent social movements. Two of its chief researchers (specialty: social movements) became government ministers administering economic policies that created the most lopsided income inequalities in recent Chilean history.

The NGOs' external links and the professional ambitions of its leaders played a major role in undermining the burgeoning popular movement. Most of its leaders became government functionaries who co-opted local leaders, while undermining rank-and-file style community assemblies. Interviews with women active in the shantytown Lo Hermida revealed the shift in the post-electoral period. "The NGOs told us that because democracy has arrived there is no need to continue the (soup-kitchen) programs. You don't need us." Increasingly the NGOs conditioned their activities on supporting the "democratic" free market regime. The NGO functionaries continued to use their participatory rhetoric to hustle votes for their parties in the government and to secure government contracts.

One striking impact of the NGOs in Chile was its relationship to the "women's movement." What started as a promising activist group in the mid-1980s was gradually taken over by NGOs who published expensive newsletters from well-furnished offices. The "leaders" who lived in fashionable neighborhoods represented a shrinking number of women. During the Latin American Feminist Conference in Chile in 1997, a militant group of rank-and-file Chilean feminist ("the autonomists") provided a radical critique of the NGO feminists as sellouts to government subsidies.

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Brazil

The most dynamic social movement in Brazil is the Landless Rural Workers Movement (MST). With over five thousand organizers and several hundred thousand sympathizers and activists, it has been directly involved in hundreds of land occupations over the past few years. At a conference organized in May 1996, by the MST, at which I spoke, the role of NGOs was one of the subjects of debate. A representative from a Dutch NGO appeared on the scene and insisted on participating. When he was told the meeting was closed, he told them that he had a "proposal" for funding ($300 thousand) community development, and insisted on entering. In no uncertain terms the MST leaders told him that they were not for sale and that anyway, they, the MST, design their own "projects" according to their own needs and don't need NGO tutors.

Later the women's caucus of the MST discussed a recent meeting with rural-based feminist NGOs. The MST women pushed for a class struggle perspective, combining direct action (land occupations) and the struggle for agrarian reform with gender equality. The NGO professionals insisted that the MST women break with their organizations and support a minimalist program of strictly feminist reforms. The end result was a tactical agreement opposing domestic violence, registering women as heads of families, and encouraging gender equality. The MST women, mostly daughters of landless peasants, perceived the NGO professionals as divisive careerists, not willing to challenge the political and economic elite that oppressed all peasants. Despite their criticisms of their male comrades, they clearly felt greater affinity with the movement than with the class-collaborationist "feminist" NGOs.

In our discussion, the MST distinguished between NGOs that contribute to the movement (money, resources, etc.) to finance class struggle, and NGOs that are essentially missionary outfits that fragment and isolate peasants, as is the case with many pentecostal and USAID and World Bank sponsored NGO projects.

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El Salvador

Throughout Latin America peasant militants have voiced serious criticisms of the role and politics of the vast majority of NGOs, particularly about the patronizing and domineering attitude that they display behind their ingratiating rhetoric of "popular empowerment" and participation. I encountered this directly during a recent visit to El Salvador, where I was giving a seminar for the Alianza Democratica Campesino (the ADC, or Democratic Peasant Alliance) which represents 26 peasant and landless workers' organizations.

Part of our collaboration involved the joint development of a project to fund a peasant-directed research and training center. Together with the leaders of the ADC we visited a private Canadian agency, CRC SOGEMA, which was subcontracted by CIDA, the Canadian government's foreign assistance agency. They administered a $25 million (Canadian) aid packet for El Salvador. Before our visit, one of the ADC leaders had held an informal discussion with one of the Salvadoran associates of CRC SOGEMA. He explained the proposal and its importance for stimulating peasant-based participatory research. The CRC SOGEMA representative proceeded to draw a figure of a person on a piece of paper. He pointed to the head. "That," he said, "is the NGOs: they think, write, and prepare programs." He then pointed to the hands and feet, "that's the peasants: they provide data and implement the projects."

This revealing episode was the background to our formal meeting with the head of CRC SOGEMA. The director told us that the money was already earmarked for a Salvadoran NGO: FUNDE (Fundacion Nacional para el Desarrollo, the National Foundation for Development), a consulting firm of upwardly mobile professionals. She encouraged the peasant leaders to co-operate and to become involved because, she said, it would be "empowering." In the course of our conversation, it emerged that the Salvadoran associate of CRC SOGEMA who had expressed that outrageous view of the relation between NGOs (the head)

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and peasants (the hands and feet) was a "link" between FUNDE and SOGEMA. The ADC leaders responded that, while FUNDE was technically competent, their "courses" and research did not meet the needs of the peasants and that they had a very paternalistic attitude toward the peasants. When the Canadian director asked for an example, the ADC leaders related the incident of the "political drawing" and the role to which it relegated peasants.

This was, said the director of SOGEMA, a "very unfortunate incident," but they were nonetheless committed to working with the FUNDE. If the ADC wished to have an impact they would best attend FUNDE meetings. The ADC leaders pointed out that the project's design and goals were elaborated by middle class professionals, while peasants were invited to collaborate by providing data and attending *their* "seminars." In a fit of annoyance, the director called the meeting to an end. The peasant leaders were furious. "Why were we led to believe that they (the Canadian agency) were interested in peasant participation, democracy, and all the other crap, when they are already plugged into the NGOs, who don't represent a single peasant? That study will never be read by any peasant, nor will it be at all relevant to our struggle for land. It will be about "modernization" and how to swindle the peasants out of their land and turn them into commercial farms or tourist areas."

Conclusion

The managers of NGOs have become skilled in designing projects. They transmit the new rhetoric of "identity" and "globalism" into the popular movements. Their activities and texts promote international cooperation, self-help, micro-enterprises, and forge ideological bonds with the neoliberals while forcing people into economic dependency on external donors. After a decade of NGO activity these professionals have "depoliticized" and de-radicalized whole areas of social life: women, neighborhoods, and youth organizations. In Peru and Chile, where the NGO's

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have become firmly established, the radical social movements have declined.

Local struggles over immediate issues are the food and substance that nurture emerging movements. NGOs certainly emphasize the "local," but the crucial question is what direction local actions will take: whether they will raise the larger issues of the social system and link up with other local forces to confront the state and its imperial backers, or whether they will turn inward, while looking to foreign donors and fragmenting into a series of competing supplicants for external subsidies. The ideology of NGOs encourages the latter.

NGO intellectuals frequently write about "co-operation" but without dwelling on the price and conditions for securing the co-operation of neoliberal regimes and overseas funding agencies. In their role as mediators and brokers, hustling funds overseas and matching the funds to projects acceptable to donors and local recipients, the "foundation entrepreneurs" are engaged in a new type of politics similar to the "labor contractors" (*enganchadores*) of the not too distant past: herding together women to be "trained"; setting up microfirms subcontracted to larger producers or exporters employing cheap labor. The new politics of the NGOs is essentially the politics of compradores: they produce no national products; instead, they link foreign funders with local labor (self-help micro-enterprises) to facilitate the continuation of the neoliberal regime. The managers of NGOs are fundamentally *political* actors whose projects and training workshops do not make any significant *economic* impact in raising workers' and peasants' incomes. But their activities do make an impact in diverting people from the class struggle into forms of collaboration with their oppressors.

To justify this approach, NGO ideologies will often invoke "pragmatism" or "realism," citing the decline of the revolutionary left, the triumph of capitalism in the East, the "crisis of Marxism," the loss of alternatives, the strength of the United States, the coups and repression by the military. This "possibilism" is used to convince the left to work within the

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niches of the free market imposed by the World Bank and structural adjustment, and to confine politics to the electoral parameters imposed by the military.

The pessimistic "possibilism" of the NGO ideologues is necessarily one-sided. They focus on neoliberal electoral victories and not on the post-electoral mass protests and general strikes that mobilize large numbers of people in extra-parliamentary activity. They look at the demise of communism in the late eighties and not to the revival of radical social movements in the mid-nineties. They describe the constraints of the military on electoral politicians without looking at the challenges to the military by the Zapatista guerrillas, the urban rebellions in Caracas, the general strikes in Bolivia. In a word, the possibilists overlook the dynamics of struggles that begin at the sectoral or local level within the electoral parameters of the military, and then are propelled upward and beyond those limits by the failures of the possibilists to satisfy the elementary demands and needs of the people.

The pragmatism of the NGOs is matched by the extremism of the neoliberals. The 1990's has witnessed a radicalization of neoliberal policies, designed to forestall crisis by handing over even more lucrative investment and speculative opportunities to overseas banks and multinationals: petroleum in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Venezuela; lower wages and less social security payments; greater tax exemption; and the elimination of all protective labor legislation. Contemporary Latin American class structure is more rigid and the state more directly tied to the ruling classes than ever. The irony is that the neoliberals are creating a polarized class structure much closer to the Marxist paradigm of society than to the NGO vision.

This is why Marxism offers a real alternative to NGO-ism. And in Latin America, there do exist Marxist intellectuals who write and speak for the social movements in struggle, committed to sharing the same political consequences. They are "organic" intellectuals who are basically part of the movement—the resource people providing analysis and education for class struggle, in contrast to the

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"post-Marxist" NGO intellectuals, who are embedded in the world of institutions, academic seminars, foreign foundations, international conferences and bureaucratic reports. These Marxist intellectuals recognize the centrality of local struggles, but they also acknowledge that the success of those struggles depends to a large extent on the outcome of the conflict between classes over state power at the national level.

What they offer is not the hierarchical "solidarity" of foreign aid and collaboration with neoliberalism, but *class* solidarity, and *within* the class, the solidarity of oppressed groups (women and people of color) against their foreign and domestic exploiters. The major focus is not on the donations that divide classes and pacify small groups for a limited time, but on the common action by members of the same class, sharing their common economic, predicament struggling for collective improvement.

The strength of the critical Marxist intellectuals resides in the fact that their ideas are in tune with changing social realities. The growing polarization of classes and the increasingly violent confrontations are apparent. So while the Marxists are numerically weak in the institutional sense, they are strategically strong as they begin to connect with a new generation of revolutionary militants, from the Zapatistas in Mexico to the MST in Brazil.

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MEXICO'S RISING INEQUALITY

by JAMES W. RUSSELL

Mexico, like most other Latin American countries, has seen social inequality significantly increase as free market reforms have been introduced. The transition from protectionist to free trade policies began, not in 1994 with the inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but rather in 1982 under the administration of Miguel de la Madrid. The new president inherited an economic crisis caused by declining oil revenues and soaring debt payments that began at the end of the administration of his predecessor, José López Portillo. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in return for new loans, required a steep peso devaluation, which resulted in declining real income for the majority of Mexicans. The IMF also applied pressure for other market-oriented reforms including a shift from protectionist to free trade policies. De la Madrid followed the IMF urging and significantly lowered tariffs on imported commodities, signalling the shift away from the decades-long policy of using high tariffs to protect domestic producers. Thus began the era of neoliberal reforms that has continued up through the present, largely capstoned—rather than begun—by the inauguration of NAFTA on January 1, 1994.

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Free trade policies historically increase social inequality by removing barriers to the pure logic of market relations—including protections for disadvantaged groups, such as the *canasta básica* of subsidized food and other services for the poor in Mexico, and state efforts to redistribute income downward. Once the market is allowed to operate without impediments, the strongest actors are able to increase their competitive advantages and accrue higher rates of income.

Free market advocates may acknowledge that distributions will grow more unequal in the short run, but will counter that. Despite that, the absolute conditions of the poor will improve because free trade will promote economic growth and, as the saying goes, when the tide comes in, all ships, large and small, will rise.

But have all ships, large and small, risen since the inauguration of free market reforms under the De la Madrid administration? To examine that question as well as the more general question of the relationship between economic growth and inequality, we will look at the years 1984 and 1994—years in which Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI) conducted national surveys of the distribution of household income.

First, the indisputable statistical facts: The INEGI survey (see Table 1) indicates that every decile of the Mexican population, except for the richest, lost relative income between 1984 and 1994. The poorest ten percent lost the most relative income, 22.3 percent, while coincidentally the richest ten percent increased their share of national personal income by exactly the same amount. There is thus no question that inequality increased significantly. But did that necessarily mean that the living conditions of the classes that lost relative income declined? The answer is no, because it would be theoretically possible for that bottom 90 percent to have gained absolutely, despite losing relatively, if there was strong enough economic growth, i.e., if the tide had risen high enough.

The tide, however, did not rise high enough to overcome the effects of rising inequality in the distribution of income. According to Inter-American Development Bank

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figures (see Table 2), gross domestic product per capita was actually 1.2 percent *lower* in 1994 than it had been in 1984; and this was not a fluke, because in 1994 GDP per capita reached its highest level since 1985. Not only did the tide not rise high enough, it ebbed.

Table 1. Distribution of Household Monetary Income in Mexico, 1984 and 1994:

	1984	1994	Percent change	
			relative	absolute
Poorest 10 percent	1.30	1.01	-22.3	-23.2
Second 10 percent	2.68	2.27	-15.3	-15.9
Third 10 percent	3.76	3.27	-13.0	-11.9
Fourth 10 percent	4.92	4.26	-13.4	-14.4
Fifth 10 percent	6.20	5.35	-13.7	-14.7
Sixth 10 percent	7.84	6.67	-14.9	-15.9
Seventh 10 percent	9.81	8.43	-14.1	-15.0
Eighth 10 percent	12.77	11.20	-12.3	-13.3
Ninth 10 percent	16.96	16.30	- 3.9	- 5.0
Richest 10 percent	33.76	41.24	22.3	20.8
Total	100.00	1 00.00		
Gini index	.4535	.5137		

Sources: Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI), *Encuesta Nacional de Ingresos y Gastos de los Hogares*, reports for 1984 and 1994 (Aguascalientes: INEGI, 1985, 1995); absolute change calculated with the aid of gross domestic product per capita data from Inter-American Development Bank, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America*, annual reports for 1994 and 1996 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1995, 1997).

I measured the income of each decile in 1994 using constant 1984 pesos and controlling for overall GDP and population growth. The results in column 4 of Table 1 indicate that the absolute income of each decile, except for the richest,

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declined. The poorest ten percent suffered the steepest decline in absolute income—23 percent. The second to the eighth deciles each suffered declines from 12 to 16 percent. The next to the richest suffered the least loss—5 percent. Meanwhile, the absolute income of the richest ten percent increased by 20.8 percent.

In social class terms, the first four deciles more or less represent the lower class of the poor, the fifth through the eighth the working class, and the ninth and most of the tenth the middle class. The upper class would be the top one percent. Thus it would appear, not surprisingly, that the lower and working classes have suffered the brunt of the declines in living standards with the upper and much of the middle classes showing absolute improvements.

Quite clearly the only decile that fared well, the richest, improved their economic fortunes not because of economic growth but because they grabbed a larger proportion of national personal income.

Table 2. Population and Economic Growth in Mexico, 1984 and 1994:

	1984	1994	% Change
Population	71,019,000	88,431,000	24.5
Gross Domestic Product*	$165,934	$204,190	23.1
GDP/per capita	$2,336	$2,309	-1.2

* millions of 1988 U.S. Dollars

Sources: Inter-American Development Bank, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America*, annual reports for 1994 and 1996, *ibid.*

This raises the more theoretical question of the nature of the relationship between economic growth and inequality. How much economic growth would have been necessary to

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both underwrite increases in absolute income for all classes and allow the same degree of increase in inequality to occur as did between 1984 and 1994? To answer this, I calculated the break even point for the poorest 80 percent—the vast majority of the population and where the lower and working classes reside. By break even point is meant how much economic growth would have been necessary, given the growth of inequality, for those combined deciles to have maintained their absolute income levels. The results indicate that Mexico would have had to have had an average annual per capita GDP growth rate of 1.6 to have both sustained the amount of redistribution of income upward and avoided a loss of absolute income for the bottom eighty percent of the population. Overall for those years the average annual per capita growth rate was -1.6. In only two years did it equal or exceed the needed 1.6 percent growth rate—1990 (2.4) and 1994 (1.6). It should be remembered that those years included both the best as well as the worst of times—when the business cycle peaked and crashed. But even in the best of times—1990 and 1994—the growth rate only equaled or moderately exceeded the 1.6 percent threshold for real per capita standard of living improvement for the bottom eighty percent, given the growing inequality.

It thus seems unlikely, if the degree of inequality continues to rise at anywhere near the same rate, that the Mexican economy will be able to grow enough to improve the absolute income of the majority of the population. Current news from Mexico indicates that the economy is growing relatively rapidly, but this news must be put into context. In December 1994 the peso crashed, sending the GDP per capita for 1995 into the subterranean depths of -8.7 percent. It bounced back slightly in 1996, due to the U.S. bailout, and recovered by 2.9 percent—above the 1.6 threshold established above. But if we average the two years, the growth rate remains subterreanean at -2.9. There is thus so much catch-up to go that this year's strong growth so far will not be suffi-

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cient to replace what the Mexican majority has lost in its standard of living.

Rising inequality and declining standards of living for the majority are of course a recipe that could portend increased political conflict within Mexico. At the least, it will increase—not decrease as had been predicted by NAFTA's architect—the incentive for people to migrate to the U.S., the traditional safety valve for Mexico's economic problems.

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MUSIC, MARXISM, AND THE HYPE ABOUT D.I.Y. ("DO-IT-YOURSELF")

by BARRY STOLLER

When surveying the job landscape through the somewhat sheltered eyes of youth, any number of individuals, not surprisingly, find the "career" of musician imbued with far more interest, status and freedom from wage tyranny than most others. The appeal of "making it" in the music business—with all the fame, glamour, money and "artistic expression" that goal implies—is a very powerful inducement indeed, and especially so for youths who question their opportunities for achieving economic independence in the sphere of job listings found in the classified ads. Motives for pursuing a musical career—expressed often as "working for myself" and "doing something that I really like"—tap into the very psyche of the Jeffersonian myth of the American Dream and provide a popular notion of capitalism at its most benevolent. Every sixteen-year old pumping gas at a summer job certainly finds irresistible the image of an Ice-T or a Slash—guys who definitely look like they might have pumped a little gas in their teens—telling the gas station manager to screw himself and then embarking on a satisfying adventure of "hitting the big time," handsomely paid and amply appreciated for expressing such potent revenge fantasies.

Barry Stoller is a working class Socialist.

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Certainly the immediate ascension, easily gained, from a lifetime of wage labor, subservience to an employer, and the ignominy of a "service" job, etc. resembles the allure of the lottery winner—a fable substantiated on the fact that someone *does* occasion to win—with one important distinction: the popular musician is not *any* individual blessed indiscriminately by Plutus, but an individual possessing talent, charisma, and a wisdom beyond his or her years from "paying dues." The fantasy of the lottery win is directed towards those without hope or self-esteem; the fantasy of the "big time" involves ego, tenacity, and even genius—all components aligned with the conventional notion of success gained through personal perseverance and skill. The popular musician (as well as the professional sports player or movie star) is the reification of the American Dream—the "proof" that any individual, from any economic background, can transcend class limitation and ascend to the highest strata in society with only the advantage of stubborn determination and talent to their name. For anyone employed in manual labor, whether ringing a cash register or installing air-conditioners, the musician's "job" is mental work, such as writing songs and giving interviews, and a form of mental work esteemed much higher than many "white collar" professions. It is especially vital to capitalist interests to proffer these celebrities to the public using the highest saturation of media exposure possible, to make "evident" the "possibility" of democratic success. (Consider all the initial ballyhoo promulgated by the press when describing the "humble origins" and "working class" neighborhoods of the Beatles.) The public, in turn, venerates the celebrity—with an unquenchable thirst to know every detail of the celebrity's gilded existence—for the vicarious pleasures of imagining the excesses of such manumission from the "everyday" world of work and economic privation. Even the slave economy of the Roman Empire acknowledged the social efficacy of such a release mechanism, evinced not only by the "bread and circus" culture but by the well-publicized freeing of slaves who survived gladiatorial combats.

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This one function of the celebrity—presenting to the public a class-impartial possibility for exceptional economic independence—is concomitant to the function of popular music as social management. Like television, best-selling fiction, and movies, music is a medium of perception divorced from the quotidian tedium, aggravation, and abasement of the working "world," a world that occupies the majority of Americans for a majority of their waking hours for a majority of their lives. Unlike this world of work—predicated upon a *division of labor* that often makes the individual insignificant to the finished product or service and almost always dependent upon the vagaries of the market and the employer—the world of mass entertainment venerates the notions of individuality, offering endless scenarios where the bold and heroic actions of one person or one couple impact the world significantly, however implausibly. This is as it should be with "escapist" culture—a parallel universe contrasting the commodification of the individual where intrepid actions result in unemployment and insecurity. Music's prime function, as is all entertainment, is to assuage and *distract* the anxieties and frustrations of the working world and—as it is the media most appealing to teenagers—to perpetuate the mating instinct which, in capitalist economies, accelerates the individual's entry to the acquisition-and-debt cycle of dependence. Consider the average first substantial acquisition of the teenager, the automobile—and all of what that possession implies about "freedom" in a sexual sense.

It is no coincidence that the line "it's gonna be alright" is used again and again by songwriters (even ones ostensibly singing about "revolution"). The prospect of future prosperity and tranquility has been inculcated by Western and Eastern religions to control oppressed peoples for centuries; the notion of heaven—a place without class discrepancies, wage-labor, and poverty—was, partially, an institutionalized promise that "everything would be alright" while legitimating a present that might be considerably less so. "Protest" singers such as Bob Dylan were heard on the radio in the 1960s, not mentioning *once* the Vietnam War, but singing about relationships with

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the opposite sex instead; although this "new sound" was skeptical and hip, the irascibility was rarely related to the work force—a place that popular musicians do not inhabit. Indeed, most pop—and rock—music of that era did little more than extol the virtues of sexual conquest and "partying."

In the late 1970s, however, a "grassroots" form of music emerged in the "punk" and the "Do-It-Yourself" (DYI) movement—a music containing in its rebelliousness a class consciousness that made it truly relevant to the working class youths who embraced the sounds and lyrics of the Sex Pistols, Dead Kennedys, etc. Part of this new sound was a rejection of the materialism evident in the "old sound": the multi-tracked, orchestrated and processed quality of such "mainstream" bands as Steely Dan, Pink Floyd, and Van Halen seemed as inaccessible as Mount Olympus itself to the youngster who purchased a "mere" Fender guitar and amplifier; the "punk sound" realigned the sounds of the "stars" with the sounds amateur musicians could make—thus reviving the possibility of economic ascension through "joining a band." In short, the ideal of "making it" requires being able to credibly say: "Hey, even *I* sound as good as that band making lots of records." Another part of the new sound was to challenge the subjective conventions of songwriting, singing about *issues* instead of personal ambitions—as songs titled "God Save The Queen" and "Kill The Poor" attest. This "populist" entertainment "sold" itself with slogans such as "keep it a hobby," as printed on Stiff records, and considered radio embargoes an indication of the music's vitality and probity. As a political stance, "Do-It-Yourself" represented non-profit co-operation between music halls and bands, eliminating retailers from distribution, publicizing shows by flyers instead of advertising media and, in general, reducing the commercial barriers between audience and musician, themselves interchangeable, as much as possible.

The accessibility of cheap musical instruments and recording facilities—abetted considerably by a "getting back to basics" in sound quality amongst professional "punk" bands—were coupled with a wave of amateur "zine" magazines that

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provided a local, "underground" media for an independent "scene"—and both bands and magazines proliferated exponentially throughout the1980s. The quality of copying machines and chromium cassettes had reached a level, since the earlier decade, that permitted "hand-made" products enough of a polish to actually be viable as marketable commodities: "cassette-only" recording companies, such as Roir and Sub-Pop, promulgated the D.I.Y. impulse in publications like *Jet Lag* and *OP*. College radio—once considered to be an abyss of esoterica—slowly became an "open audition" for regional labels and, later, a "test market" for commercial record companies investing in the "new wave." Significantly, during this time, the advent of a "new and improved" technology—the digital compact disc—was beginning to spread from the music industry to consumers, threatening the vinyl disc with obsolescence, and certainly insuring the dismissal of the cassette; similarly, the "desk-top publishing" of the personal computer would eclipse the lowly "xerox" zine, splintering collaborative efforts with the profusion of personal "web pages." Once a popular form of media had come into existence, the means of production were "upgraded" by industry and offered to consumers—as a method of wresting from them their independence. This process, shown here in microcosm, is characteristic of capitalism's aggressive and exclusionary nature.

Opportunism prevailed throughout the 1980s, reaching a pinnacle with the Seattle "signing frenzy" in 1992. College DJs were offered positions in the recording industry after graduation for "leaning on" major releases; local and regional acts, represented on cassettes, were relegated to "home-grown" shows. Bands, by "necessity," transferred their recordings onto vinyl to realize even a *chance* for exposure on college radio;[1] zines with substantial "street" credibility, such as *Maximum Rock N Roll* and *Flipside* began excluding cassettes from review consideration, qualifying—ostensibly in lieu of poor recording quality—that "if four guys can't get it together to come up with a thousand bucks to press a 45" then perhaps their efforts would not merit the reviewer's attention. In order for a song to be heard, by anyone, a musician was coerced to

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"employ" a vinyl pressing plant's services to issue a recording that would sound more or less the same on cassette as it would on a disc for several hundred dollars more. Not surprisingly, many musicians, faced with this extra expenditure, economized by investing less in the studio preparation of their recordings—producing 45s and LPs that sounded like "cassettes" instead of producing cassettes that sounded like "records." By the mid-1990s, a "credible" demo was considered—by mag reviewers, college DJs and venue booking agents—to be a short CD. The one cassette showcase possessing national distribution, Jim Santo's "Demorandum" in *Alternative Press,* expanded its format but restricted its circulation by moving from the mag to the internet, thus necessitating the addition of a computer to the equipment list of a starting band.

The content of music also has circumscriptions affecting it. Most nascent bands are aware that the first opportunities they have of being heard occur in the local bar—thus necessitating a relationship, often incongruous if not unnatural, between music and alcohol sales. "Local" music is almost always heard by those over the age of 18 and at night, within a culture of beer-drinking—contrary to music's obvious appeal as its own stimulant. Not only are "struggling" musicians required to provide a parasitic vinyl and CD industry with revenues simply to be heard, but must also generate liquor sales to "club" owners in order to justify their continuing existence. Bands quickly adapt not only their sound, but their lyric content, to the milieu they find themselves in—a service industry that needs more cocktail waitresses and bartenders on the "floor" than artistic geniuses on the stage. That all manifestations of musical expression adopt the escapist demands of such a market can be easily evinced by the high ratio of alcohol advertising in commercial music magazines. Contrary to popular opinion, "selling out" does not begin with "the big record deal," it begins much sooner—with the need to find an audience that drinks a lot of alcohol. Further on, up the ladder of "making it" in the music business, musicians are employed to generate enormous profits for record com-

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panies, music magazines, commercial radio stations (including MTV) and the music-hall and arena stadium landlords; the extravagant fees that "artists" command elevate them into the strata of the ruling classes and, in turn, alienates their music far from the lives of their "listening public."[2]

Celebrities, according to the conventional wisdom, are needed by average men and women much as the gods of antiquity were needed—to act on behalf of the impulses of the "masses," against the frustrations imposed by norms of "civilized behavior" as well as restrictions mandated by economic conditions. The contradiction between worshiping these idols and wishing to become one can be observed in as ubiquitous an experience as an "open mike," where many a musician or a band, tediously awaiting their turn to play, feels little more than complete derision for the musician or band playing before them. Class discrepancy always avers that there's only so much room at the top. This is why D.I.Y. inevitably remains an unachieved ideal—the goal to ascend and to become superior proves stronger than the "democratic" notion that, if music is accessible to all and all are musicians, one must play the part of the audience as well as the part of the performer. The capitalist division of labor decrees that one individual may be the "rock star," while another presses records in a factory, becomes a music shop clerk or serves beer in a nightclub. "Fair competition" of the marketplace ostensibly decides which individual will get which position—although it is to be acknowledged that gigs are decided upon by booking agents and record contracts are determined by A&R representatives of record companies, and bands unable to finance CDs and magazine advertisements, no matter how "qualified" they may be, receive no consideration from the "powers that be."

Ultimately, the desire to "make it in music" is exclusionary and bourgeois. As Frederick Engels stated in *Anti-Duhring*:

> It is true that, to the mode of thought of the educated classes..., it must seem monstrous that in time to come there will no longer be any professional porters or architects, and that the man who for half

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an hour gives instructions as an architect will also push a barrow for a period, until his activity as an architect is once again required.[3]

Pop music may be the "voice of the masses" but, like the radio waves it arrives on, its substance is created, controlled, and censored by the ruling class who, determining supply, determines demand as well. That musicians aspire to "make a living" as professionals, shows their acquiescence to class discrepancy. The musician accepts the idea that the audience will be the ones who serve the beer, press the records, sell the guitars, and ring the cash registers. The musician's justification of this social arrangement (that's OK because *I'm* the one who's got what it takes to make it), is itself a highly idiosyncratic denial that the American Dream is a pyramid scheme. Yet, as C. Wright Mills succinctly put it, "people with advantages are loath to believe that they just happen to have advantages,"[4] and for every Phil Ochs that gets heard there are countless others, creators of useful and insightful music, abandoning their abilities and selling off their equipment—and returning to the wage-labor world musicians rarely ever mention.

NOTES

1. DJs asseverate, and not without justification that "cuing" cassettes is both difficult and time-consuming. The lack of standardization of tape counters has perpetuated this problem while the ability of DAT players to automatically cue songs on tapes reveals an industry failure to upgrade cassette technology—favoring the development of CDS to make music-making more expensive and exclusive.
2. Consider U2's latest tour, guaranteeing the band $128 million.
3. Frederick Engels, *Anti-Duhring*, (International Publishers, 1935) 228-9pp.
4. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, (London: Oxford, 1956) 14p.

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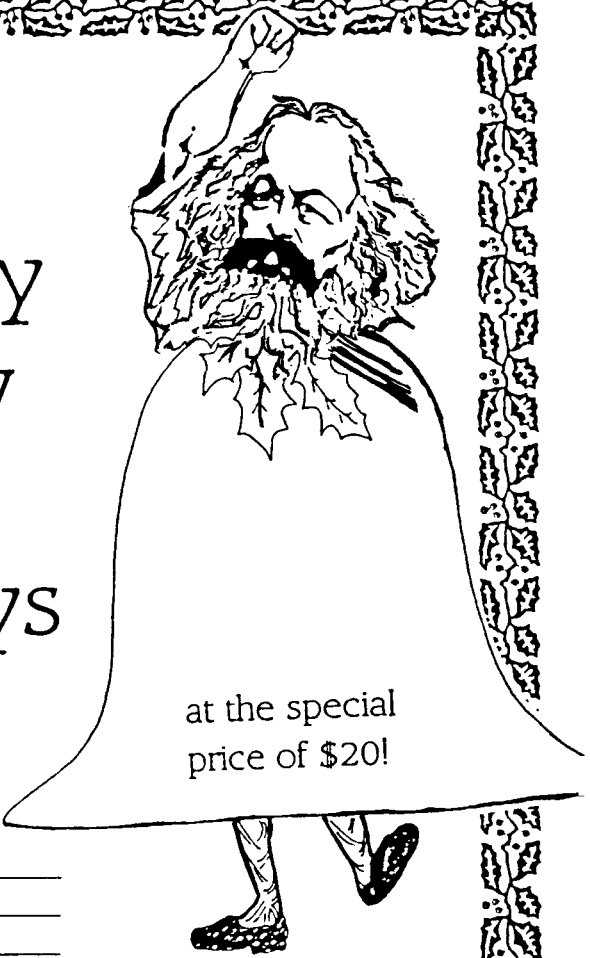

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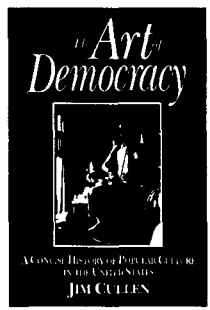

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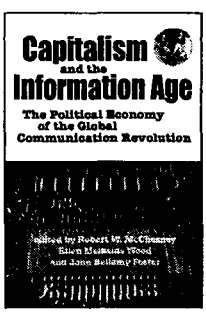

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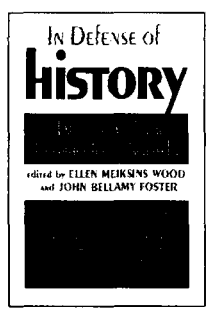

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The Deng Xiaoping Era

by Bruce Cumings

Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era: An Inquiry into the Fate of Chinese Socialism, 1978-1994* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996) $30.00 cloth. 544pp.

This is the best book yet to appear on the recent period of reform and de-Maoization in China, and it is likely to remain the definitive account because the "Deng Xiaoping era" has now ended with the death in 1997 of the last titan of Chinese Communism. Maurice Meisner has long been, in my view, the leading American student of China, beginning with his seminal study of the founder of Chinese Marxism, Li Dazhao. But he is also one of this country's most thoughtful intellectuals. It is his historical sensibility that distinguishes this account from so much contemporary analysis. Better than anyone else, Professor Meisner links past to present in a continuous and much-pondered narrative, about a country with a particularly tortuous twentieth-century path; where other experts seem blown this way and that by the contradictory winds emanating from Beijing in the past five decades, Meisner scrupulously weighs past interpretations against present realities and the best evidence, maintaining a steady, satisfying, and finally commanding interpretation. More than most others, also, he uses theory to guide his inquiry and to pick and choose wisely among the welter of information coming out of this fascinating country.

That theory is Marxism, wielded as a critical tool throughout the book but worn lightly, precisely because Meisner knows his Marxism so well. In the late 1990s this also comes as a breath of

Bruce Cumings teaches East Asian and international history at the University of Chicago, and is the author most recently of *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (Norton, 1997)

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fresh air, because we have become so inured over the past decade to people claiming that Marx is dead. Professor Meisner effectively discriminates between the democratic and communal socialism that Marx envisioned, the state socialism of the first thirty years after the People's Republic was founded, and the bureaucratic capitalism that has held sway in the past two decades. In between we find a consistent Chinese lineage, of age-old bureaucratic practice and a power elite that endures through every change since 1949, including the revolution itself. Except for one period, that is: the Cultural Revolution. We are now expected to condemn every aspect of the Cultural Revolution and throw out its lessons, root and branch, except the lesson of the dangers of personal despotism. Meisner, to the contrary, subjects that important episode to his careful critical scrutiny—exploring Mao's personal dictatorship, the widespread chaos, death and destruction of which we are now well aware, and the truth that has been lost: that the Cultural Revolution took as its primary target the bureaucrats, and especially the high Communist Party cadres:

> The Cultural Revolution raised profoundly important questions about the means and ends of socialism in the twentieth-century.... At no time in world history have the consequences of the transformation of revolutionaries into rulers been exposed so clearly.... Rarely has there been so searching an inquiry into the sources of inequality, elitism, hierarchy, and bureaucracy (p. 53).

This is but one example of Meisner's historical method, which is to weigh and assess the Chinese record honestly, avoiding none of the tough questions, exercising the moral and political judgement that falls to the historian, and doing so with the integrity of the narrative uppermost in his mind. This method is also a high tribute to the Chinese people: Meisner believes they— through sacrifices most Americans can only imagine— produced the greatest social revolution of our turbulent century; that their leaders created a proud and independent country out of the "sick man of Asia," and that the leaders and the people proceeded to develop its industrial economy at a rate comparable only to the greatest surges of growth in history (England's in the "industrial revolution" of the nineteenth-century, for example—p. 256). Unlike most other accounts, this one posits that the rapid growth of the Deng era rested on the successful creation of a modern industrial base under Mao's leadership.

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Meisner does not think, however, that the PRC has ever been socialist, and the revolution still has not brought what the Chinese people demanded ever since the watershed May Fourth Movement in 1919: democracy. Furthermore the Deng era has not only reversed the progress toward socialism in the previous period, but built the foundations of a rapacious capitalism while sapping the spirits of an increasingly cynical population, and depriving millions of Chinese of the one indelible achievement of the social revolution: the right to eat, to a job, to housing, and to a rough social security. So the verdict he levies is really quite devastating: if Mao failed at democracy and building socialism, Deng began by dismissing the promise of both, only to achieve a highly inegalitarian if rapid form of capitalist growth, under the legitimation of an increasingly strident and xenophobic nationalism. It is now an entirely fair question to ask if, assuming these trends continue, the Chinese Communists have created anything enduring that would not also have been accomplished under the Nationalists (the defeated party in China's civil war, residing on Taiwan ever since). China has finally joined the world economy, after decades of trying to do something else (form a socialist world market with Moscow, pursue self-reliance), but only as a hell-bent-for-leather "Asian tiger," taking as its model Singapore under Lee Kwan Yew or South Korea under Park Chung Hee. Throughout the volume Meisner asks if there should not be something more to show for China's century of revolution and turmoil, than this restless search for wealth and power.

Some readers might expect that this thorough critique from a Marxist standpoint would accompany a lack of concern for the "bourgeois" intellectuals and students who have promoted human rights and democracy in China during the Mao and Deng periods, almost always at great risk. But that is far from the case. Meisner has sensitive portrayals of key activists like long-time political prisoner Wei Jingsheng, Liu Binyan (who also suffered in prison for years, and who became famous for scathing portrayals of the privilege and corruption of ruling cadres), and many others. Meisner illustrates how these very activists, many of whom suffered during the Cultural Revolution, also remain true to democratic socialist ideals. Wei, for example, wrote in 1978 that "the Cultural Revolution was the first time the Chinese people displayed their power and made all the reactionary forces shudder," but its socialist and democratic impulses were betrayed by the ruling party "ty-

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rants" (as he called them—p. 117). Whereas most Western analysts simply assume that liberal democracy is the pot of gold at the end of the developmental rainbow (thus justifying a "temporary" authoritarian path to development), Meisner argues that:

> Democracy *qua* democracy is valued by the Chinese people; it is not ... a value carried only by students and intellectuals. Chinese demands for democratic rights arose around the turn of the century and soon spread from revolutionary intellectuals and students to the urban masses (p. 353).

Amid his careful and always beautifully written analysis, Professor Meisner also has many new things to say. I was unaware, for example, that as Mao's death approached in 1976, Deng Xiaoping contemplated a possible civil war against the "Gang for Four" and their supporters, in which he would rely on the armed forces of three southern regional commands (p. 63). This fact is particularly disturbing in the light of many analyses in the 1990s predicting a return to the old pattern of dynastic decline, regional war and national division (none of which have proved true as yet, of course). Particularly impressive is Meisner's account of the successes, failures, and contradictions of China's famous "one-child" population policy. Just as the leadership successfully won over many urban citizens to this millennial change in child-rearing practices, it instituted reforms in the much more populous agrarian sector, called the household responsibility system, in which peasants "quite naturally found it desirable to have more rather than fewer children" (p. 244).

Perhaps I have emphasized the negative side of *The Deng Xiaoping Era* because it contrasts so mightily with the reflexive daily fare of American coverage, where every Chinese move toward capitalism and "opening" is praised (Deng was *Time's* man of the year twice), and every hint that China might have an independent position or might not be following the American way is condemned. The reader will find much that is positive about Deng's important legacy in this book as well, and a negative account of the Mao period that, if taken out of context, would be devastating. But then Meisner's great gift is the provision of accurate context for both eras; he is a deeply informed, empathetic observer who represents the best that the historian's calling can offer. If Maurice Meisner has much to teach Americans about China and our relations with it, he also has much to say to the Chinese people themselves. Perhaps that is why his work is more famous in China than it is in his native country.

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It is quite likely that what Deng Xiaoping let loose upon China will eventually turn out badly from the American perspective. If so, all the political and moral balences will shift overnight, and the same people who bring you "engagement" now, will bring you a new and dangerous form of "containment" then. This pleasurable book will prepare you for either outcome.

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Washington Babylon

by Vijay Prashad

Alexander Cockburn and Ken Silverstein, *Washington Babylon* (New York: Verso, 1996) $17.00 paper. 316 pp.

For those who subscribe to their newsletter *Counterpunch*, the vigorous writing of Cockburn and Silverstein will be no surprise. That journal, like *Washington Babylon*, is filled with exposures of what most of us on the left suspect, and of what we could find between the lines of our daily press (if we knew how to look). The tragedy is that too few of us can pay the scrupulous attention paid by the authors, who produce in *Washington Babylon* a directory of corruption among the U.S. power elite and its minions. The six chapters of *Washington Babylon* take us from the media ("Babel's Tongues"), to the Congress, the lobbyists' world, the Pentagon ("Pork Central"), the green establishment, and the Presidency. We are treated to small but illuminating facts (that Cokie Roberts' brother is Tommy Boggs, Washington's top fundraiser for the Democrats and lobbyist for the insurance, legal, and other interests), as well as big and illuminating facts (the relationship of the oil monopolies and the green foundations), and along the way we learn quite a bit about the American Empire. For this, *Washington Babylon* deserves to be widely read.

The gem of the book is the first chapter, on the media. This has much to do with the authors' profession and obsession, but it deserves its leading place so as to leave no doubt as to why we have never heard the tale of gross corruption that is to follow. *Washington*

Vijay Prashad, is assistant professor in International Studies at Trinity College, Hartford Coneticat who last appeared in *Monthly Review* October 1994.

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Babylon lays out the reasons for the media's silence, and it should be no surprise that those reasons are the very corruption it fails to report. Cockburn and Silverstein detail the way that the U.S. super rich interconnect with the ultra-right to create think tanks that hand out cash to favored publicists (such as the Coors'-funded Heritage Foundation, the Free Congress Foundation, and the American Defense Institute) and to fund the production and slick marketing of books by right-wing academics (such as Olin's support for Allan Bloom and Irving Kristol). Finally, we are led to appreciate the effects of editorial engineering of the news in the joint interests of entertainment and right-wing consensus. One product is a cultural callousness: between 1991 and 1993, as the Rwanda crisis gathered, the press concentrated its attention on endangered Rwandan mountain apes rather than on the accelerating bloodbath that enveloped that nation.

"Public service" at the command of the largest concentrations of money, is corruption. But this basic fact the media simply cannot take on board. There have been moments when this structural hypocricy of the American Way has been recognized: "the relationship between money and politics is so organic that seeking reform is tantamount to asking a doctor to perform open-heart surgery on himself" (*Newsweek*, December 13, 1971). But this is the way it has been since at least the first administration of Ulysses Grant in 1869. It was no secret to President Grover Cleveland who in 1884 noted that "no harm shall come to any business interest as the result of administrative policy as long as I am President ... a transfer of executive control from one party to another does not mean any serious disturbance of existing conditions." It didn't and it doesn't. Cleveland was beholden to John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company, to William Whitney and his New York City streetcar and real estate interests, to Carnegie's steel interests, and to the bankers and bond dealers of Wall Street where he was to retire to a comfortable law practice on leaving the Presidency. For Clinton the list is a bit different, but not much.

A century after Cleveland, barons such as Dwayne Andreas of Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), a $13 billion agro-industrial firm, provide the bulk of the cash to keep the political canaries singing. Andreas' career of corruption began with the Republicans (notably Nixon's Committee to Re-Elect the President or—one of the truly great Washington acronyms of our time—CREEP), but in 1994 he raised over $2.5 million for the Democrats. ADM controls about

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seventy percent of the U.S. ethanol market and it benefits from a $2 billion public subsidy. In October 1996 ADM reached an agreement with the Justice Department to pay $100 million in fines for fixing the prices of lysine and citric acid, but was left scot free on the charge of fixing the price of high fructose corn syrup. The latter is a $3 billion product, and if the government had pursued the antitrust remedies for ADM's corn syrup price fixing, the fine would have been very much greater.

Instead, the United States opted for the lesser infractions and gave ADM immunity from further prosecution. A similar deal was struck with the tobacco industry, who plied many millions into Congressional coffers in a splendidly bipartisan manner. These tales are typical. *Washington Babylon* details the shenanigans of many others, such as the cash lubricated relationship of Arkansas chicken parts magnate Don Tyson and the Clintons, the slimy friends and deals of Clinton's former Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, the ties of the Enron Corporation with Treasury Secretary Rubin, and other links through which great wealth runs the American system.

Of course, at moments "everyone" talks about reform of "campaign finance" and "everyone" is in favor of it. But the plutocracy has nothing to worry about. When a campaign finance stink arose in the last weeks before the 1996 election, the media didn't train its guns on the great corporations and the reins of cash by which they run Washington, but on "Asians." Without doubt the $1 million donated by James Riady's Lippo Group to the Democrats could tell us lots about Babylon's intimate links to such thugs, closely associated with that old U.S. friend and mass murderer, Suharto of Indonesia. In the CIA-backed coup of 1965 Suharto oversaw the slaughter of more than one-half million people, then initiated the looting of natural resources that has made his family worth over $25 billion and left Indonesia in a state of eco-disaster. Gabriel Kolko tells us that "no single American action after 1945 was as bloodthirsty as its role in Indonesia," (*Confronting the Third World*, p.188).

Washington Babylon recounts the links between the U.S. Capitol and the murderous plunder of Indonesia. Freeport McMoRan, represented in Washington by Henry Kissinger, has extracted enormous wealth in Indonesian gold and copper, and in logging operations in precious rain forests. The company operates private armies in the area of its highly polluting operations, and executes its opponents. Kissinger is a fitting Freeport McMoRan representative. While he headed the State Department, Indonesia was given the

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green light to invade East Timor, leading to the massacre of an estimated 200 thousand opponents of the Jakarta regime. Kissinger was in Jakarta on December 7, 1975, the day before the invasion, and he told the press in July 1995 that since he was a global player, he didn't have time for "a little speck" like East Timor. *Washington Babylon* lists some of Suharto's special Washington friends: Democrats such as Inouye, Feinstein, J.Bennet Johnson, Republicans like Alan Simpson, and bureaucrats like the Pentagon's Stanley Roth. But the links between the U.S. Capitol (and U.S. capital) and the obscenity of recent Indonesian history were not what was exposed by the campaign finance stories. Instead the stories played to a further obscenity, racism directed against Asian Americans. This blowback of CIA-generated murder, wealth, and ecocide into U.S. politics is most excellently set out by Cockburn and Silverstein.

The cover of the paperback edition carries a quote from the *Village Voice*, declaring it as "down and dirty muckraking." In many ways *Washington Babylon* is within the muckraking tradition of Upton Sinclair (on the meatpacking industry), Ida Tarbell (on Standard Oil), and Lincoln Steffens (on City Hall). There is one premise it shares with the tradition and another it does not. The difference is that the writers of the early 1900s believed that under the muck one could find a pristine, arcadian American ready and able to set things right; Cockburn and Silverstein have traveled too deeply into the depths of the imperial corruption of our times to believe in such an American Dream. For them, the United States has long since been captured by the dominant class of the corporate super rich, whose publicists have reduced the Dream to a high-tech commercial. But the one thing *Washington Babylon* nonetheless appears to share with the muckrakers is an apparent belief that the revelation of truth by itself will suffice. There is no discussion of what might be the roots for a rebellion against corruption, nor is there any assessment of the way forward. The danger is that what might instead be inspired is but the solitary burden of cynicism. The book ends with a note of weariness and we are left to feel the weight of Leviathan. I suppose it is for this reason that the authors choose to invoke Babylon, the place of absolute evil.

The problem for a Marxist reader is that the book is without any elaborated sense of the contradictions of the system or of everyday political life. It describes, but does not sufficiently explain. Anger and disgust at the monstrous corruption of imperial Washington is only a starting point; and we do need to start.

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The Martian Trilogy

by John Newsinger

Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars* (New York: Bantom, 1992) $6.99 paper. 592pp.; *Green Mars* (New York: Bantom, 1993) $6.99 paper. 640pp.; *Blue Mars* (New York: Bantom, 1996) $6.99 paper. 640pp.

At a time when the left seems to be on the defensive and in retreat just about everywhere, it is a cause of some celebration to have a best-selling, award-winning fictional trilogy that celebrates humanity's ability to take control of its destiny and to establish a socialist community, a community where economy and society are organized to satisfy human needs, where diversity flourishes and it is possible for everyone to fulfill their full potential, free from the chains of class, race, and gender. As the trilogy's author, Kim Stanley Robinson, has himself put it, in the aftermath of the collapse of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe, it is very important not to throw the socialist baby out with the Stalinist bath water!

At one point in the trilogy, a revolutionary congress is discussing the planet's future constitution and Vlad Taneev is arguing the socialist case:

> If democracy and self-rule are the fundamentals, then why should people give up these rights when they enter their work place? In politics we fight like tigers for freedom, for the right to elect our leaders, for freedom of movement, choice of residence, choice of what work to pursue—control of our lives in short. And then we wake up in the morning and go to work, and all those rights disappear. We no longer insist on them. And so for most of the day we return to feudalism. That is what capitalism is—a version of feudalism in which capital replaces land, and business leaders replace kings. But the hierarchy remains. And so we still hand over our lives' labour, under duress, to feed rulers who do no real work ... Management is a real thing,

John Newsinger is a history lecturer at Bath College of Higher Education and the author of *Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Pluto Press, 1994).

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a technical matter. But it can be controlled by labour just as well as by capital. Capital itself is simply the useful residue of the work of past labourers, and it could belong to everyone as well as to the few. There is no reason why a tiny nobility should own the capital, and everyone else therefore be in service to them. There is no reason they should give us a living wage and take all the rest that we produce. No! The system called capitalist democracy was not really democratic at all. That's why it was able to turn so quickly into the metanational system, in which democracy grew weaker and capitalism grew stronger. In which one percent of the population owned half the wealth, and five percent of the population owned ninety-five percent of the wealth. History has shown which values were real in that system. And the sad thing is that the injustice and suffering caused by it were not at all necessary, in that the technical means have existed since the eighteenth century to provide the basics of life to all.

These arguments carry the day, the neoconservatives are defeated and a socialist order is successfully established. It is a fair assumption that, at best, only a tiny minority of *MR* readers will be familiar with Robinson's fiction. Why? Because he writes science fiction. The year of his revolutionary congress is 2128 and the place is Mars. Unfortunately, even today, science fiction is still a ghettoized literature, read only by "fans," so that a powerful tradition of satirical, critical and utopian writing is seriously neglected. From H.G. Wells, Jack London and William Morris to Marge Piercy and Ursula Le Guin, socialist writers have written science fiction. Only last year in Tory Britain, the runner-up for the prestigious Arthur C. Clarke Award was Ken McCleod's tremendous Trotskyist novel of class struggle and revolution, *The Star Fraction* (1996). Indeed, in the first volume of Robinson's trilogy, one of the revolutionary leaders is a certain Arkady Bogdanov. This is a knowing reference to the Bolshevik leader of the same name, himself the author in 1907 of a science fiction novel, *Red Star,* that told of the successful establishment of socialism on Mars! This novel provides an obvious inspiration for Robinson's work.

Robinson was a successful science fiction writer before the publication of his Mars novels. He was best known as the author of the so-called "Orange County Trilogy," three novels that explore different futures for California. In the first, *The Wild Shore* (1984), the United States has been devastated by nuclear war and is quarantined by the rest of the world with the survivors desperately trying to rebuild at least something of what they have lost. This early work is well-written and has passages of great power, but Robinson is still too bound by the conventions of the genre. The two later novels, *The Gold Coast* (1988) and *Pacific Edge* (1990) are much more substantial works, the first a dystopian and the second a utopian

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fiction. They are arguably his best novels to date. Not only do they present finely realized futures, but Robinson shows uncommon powers of characterisation, writes superb prose, and shows ordinary people grappling with complex difficulties. Tremendous stuff.

The Mars trilogy is very different in conception. Here characterization is, to some extent, sacrificed to the grandeur of his vision: the remaking of a whole world, the revolutionary achievement of independence from Earth and the creation of a socialist Mars. The planet itself is arguably the main character in the first two volumes, with Robinson effectively conveying its astonishing topography. The novels celebrate science as a practical engagement with the material world, both transforming Mars and transforming humanity. They are books of ideas in which the characters debate and argue, wonder and marvel about their new world.

Almost without exception, the reviews the trilogy has received in science fiction magazines and journals have focused on its science and completely ignored its politics. Debate has centred on the validity of Robinson's portrayal of Mars, of his account of terraforming and the likelihood of longevity treatment. This is quite astonishing. The trilogy presents a devastating vision of an Earth dominated by a handful of metanationals, the descendants of today's multinationals, that completely dwarf the world's governments. The metanational corporations have presided over wars, ecological disaster, and a threatening Malthusian catastrophe. As far as they are concerned, Mars is merely a colony to be ruthlessly exploited, despoiled in the same way that they have despoiled the Earth. It is this that provokes revolution.

In 2062 Mars has its 1905, an unsuccessful outbreak that is bloodily crushed by United Nations forces. The revolutionary movement is driven underground (sometimes literally), but finally succeeds in overthrowing the rule of the metanationals in 2127. This successful revolution is comparatively bloodless, reflecting the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe. For Robinson, if the people withdraw their support and acquiescence then systems fall! The last volume *Blue Mars*, sees him explore the nature of life in a libertarian socialist society, a society where there are still problems to be overcome and a future to be argued about. It concludes a marvellous literary achievement. What is particularly important is that Robinson does not prescribe the future, but presents arguments about it. Time and again he asks: What is to be done? Inevitably his readers on the left will find much both to agree and disagree with. He has written a major contribution to the body of socialist fiction.

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Strategy and Conflict

by Lynn Turgeon

Randall W. Stone, *Satellites and Commissars. Strategy and Conflict in the Politics of Soviet-Bloc Trade* (Princenton University Press, 1996) $39.50. 283 pp.

The author is Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Rochester as of July, 1996. This book is based on his dissertation which won the Charles Sumner Prize from Harvard University and the 1994 Helen Reid Award from the American Political Science Association.

Professor Stone has taken nice advantage of the new research possibilities arising out of glasnost and the break-up of the Soviet bloc. His interviews with top administrators and negotiators connected with the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) are fascinating and specialists in Eastern European economies should be appreciative. His interviews were primarily with Russian, Polish, Czech and Hungarian economists, although he reports on the positions of the East Germans, Romanians and Bulgarians in trade negotiations.

The author's "central puzzles are the persistent failures of socialist allies to cooperate in the economic realm and the apparent paradox of a great power that fails to defend its own interests." The new evidence demonstrates that the Soviet Union's controls over its satellites was much weaker than was believed during the years of the cold war. He attempts to explain why "the Soviet policy of economic integration with Eastern Europe was such a conspicuous

Lynn Turgeon is professor Emeritus of Economics at Hofstra University Hempstead, New York. A longer version of review to appear in *Perspectives on Political Science.*

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failure. What explains the inability of the Soviet leadership to use political resources to political effect?"

The overall thrust of this intra-bloc trade was cheap Soviet energy and raw materials in exchange for overpriced satellite machinery of poor quality. As a consequence, it was generally the East Europeans that favored increased trade with the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Union that had to decline politely. East Europeans frequently won key concessions simply by raising the level of protocol, appealing to higher levels of the Soviet hierarchy and often winning their appeals.

The Soviet trade subsidy was not a carefully calibrated instrument of Soviet control over its satellites. Although agreeing with the general thrust of Marrese and Vanous's conclusions that the Soviet Union subsidized Eastern Europe, he denies that the discrimination between Eastern European countries was allocated in a rational manner. Instead, it was the East Europeans who made the critical decisions that determined the distribution of the Soviet subsidy, not some strategist in Moscow. The total volume of the subsidy depended on world marked forces beyond Soviet control.

Taking three case studies of the relationship between politics and trade —Czechoslovakia in 1968: Hungary from 1970-1982; and Poland in 1981—he finds "no compelling evidence that the Soviet Union ever used its trade subsidy as leverage to force the East Europeans to make domestic political changes."

The general pattern was that most reforms proposed by the Soviets were adopted, but there were no cases of overt pressure to push through their own proposals. The one major point that the Soviets supported but failed to be adopted was a proposal to increase interest charges on trade deficits to spur countries to repay their debts. Typically both Hungary and Czechoslovakia frequently ran large surpluses in their trade with the Soviet Union—particularly as oil prices tumbled in the 80s—but they never could agree on the level of interest to be charged, and thus this Soviet initiative floundered.

Professor Stone examines the international trade planned for 1991-1995 although the CMEA had collapsed before it was scheduled to go into effect. He argues that the "most ambitious attempt to reform the CMEA had apparently already failed before the dramatic political events of 1989 swept it away." While CMEA planned to move toward convertibility, the Soviet Union did not propose to move rapidly to introduce hard-currency

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trading (shock therapy), which could establish equivalency in CMEA trade prices.

All of the governments in Eastern Europe fell in the second half of 1989 so that when the 45th CMEA Session met in Sofia in January 1990, after repeated delays, the context of its discussion was a changed world. By then most of the countries had decided to launch their own radical market transformations. It would have been interesting if Stone had given us some inkling of the Sofia discussions, but there is no evidence of differences between the East Europeans and the former Soviet Union on the use of hard currency in all future transactions. Instead he only mentions that in June 1990 the Soviet Union announced that it would no longer subsidize its former satellites. Beginning on 1 January 1991, it would accept only hard-currency in payments for its exports, which would be delivered at current world market prices.

Contrary to the expectations of a number of authors, East European opposition to particular integration initiatives was not driven by a desire to reduce dependence on Soviet trade. Instead their primary objective was to maximize their shares of the Soviet trade subsidy.

The audience for this book includes specialists in Eastern European studies. This volume supplements the collection edited by Ha-Joon Chang and Peter Nolan, *The Transformation of the Communist Economies*, which points out that Vietnam, also a member of CMEA, had a more successful transition to a market-oriented economy than any of the Eastern European countries.

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Surviving in Tough Country

by J. Quinn Brisben

Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Red Dirt: Growing Up Okie* (New York: Verso, 1997) $25.00. 224pp.

As a couple of New Yorkers once wrote: "The wavin' wheat / Can sure smell sweet / When the wind comes right behind the rain," but the Oklahoma wind can dry up your crop or bring flash floods, not to mention hailstones the size of baseballs or tornados that rip the hides right off the cattle. As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz describes this world—her world—in her moving memoir *Red Dirt: Growing Up Oki*:

> In Oklahoma we though we knew everything. In that tiny total universe we divided the world into opposites: male and female; animal and human; sky and earth; night and day; winter and summer; good and bad; country and city; poor and rich; patriot and traitor; devil and God.... Winter was neither preceded by autumn colors nor followed by spring flowers and gentle rain; winter simply turned into chaos along about April ... hot, howling wind that carried clouds of red dirt and spread raging prairie fires.... Our world was Manichaean not Buddhist; no yin and yang. There was not balance, just absolutes.

Dunbar-Ortiz was female, country, poor, often regarded as a traitor, and inclined to side with rebels from the devil on down to Little Richard and Jack Kerouac. She saw the beauty of the land, but could never stomach the mindless boosterism and fear of criticism that small American communities impose upon their

J. Quinn Brisben, a retired Chicago high school teacher who has been an activist in many social causes since the 1950s, was born and raised in Garfield Country, Oklahoma, two counties north of Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's Canadian County.

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members. She was acutely aware of the shaky social standing of her own family, especially of her part-Indian mother who had had a rough bringing up and went from teetotaler to drunkard with frightening rapidity during Dunbar-Ortiz's adolescence.

She was also aware that as an American of mostly Scots-Irish ancestry, she was part of a group which for centuries had been privileged to kill or exploit races and cultures regarded as inferior. It was more complex than that: African American cavalrymen had not only been used against natives but also against white "boomers" and "sooners" who occupied land before the government gave them permission. Later African Americans were used to break strikes. Indian tribes were used against each other. Native Americans had sufficient political savvy to get themselves declared white by the segregationist 1907 state constitution.

Like many of us who chose to question and sometimes fight, she had to struggle against the willed cultural amnesia that was especially virulent in Oklahoma during the 1940s and 1950s. She knew that she had had an IWW grandfather and was aware that the Socialist and labor movements had been violently repressed during and after The First World War by police terrorism aided by organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. The memory of the great camp meeting addressed by Eugene V. Debs, Kate Richards O'Hare, and the radical humorist Oscar Ameringer (whom many considered the peer of Will Rogers) had long since faded. Dunbar-Ortiz was never told that Oklahoma had once had dozens of Socialist newspapers, that the Socialist were once the ranking minority in the Oklahoma legislature, and the United States entry into the First World War had been greeted with an armed uprising of tenant farmers. She saw the Weavers at the Oklahoma State Fair in 1949, but they were soon blacklisted and their songs suppressed, and she knew little else of songwriters like Oklahoma's Woody Guthrie until after she had left the state. There were witnesses to Oklahoma's radical past, but the vast majority of them were afraid to talk.

The land in Canadian County is level, but the metaphorical playing field for its inhabitants was not. Schools in the towns did not equal schools in the country; schools for the children of the poor were always and markedly inferior. Baptists were not equal to Episcopalians. Members of the Church of Christ were not equal to Baptists. No Roman Catholic was equal to any variety of Protestant. The unchurched were even more despised pariahs than the Catholics. Young women who made dresses from feed sacks printed with

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attractive patterns were not equal to young women who bought dresses in stores. Publicly noticing any of these inequalities could get you blacklisted or run out of the state, as Dunbar-Ortiz and I can bear witness. Yet people did not always show their unpleasant side, and it is possible to retain pleasant memories of Oklahoma's land and people, as both of us do.

Dunbar-Ortiz faced many obstacles, both blatant and subtle, but she acquired an education that was fundamentally sound if a little patchy, and she learned to master her own demons and to cope with those that troubled her loved ones. She has been frustrated and trapped many times, but she has refused to stay trapped. Along the way she has learned to write some really remarkable prose, as true to her Oklahoma roots as that of Ralph Ellison to his. This memoir should be read by everyone who wants a true understanding of an important part of the American experience.

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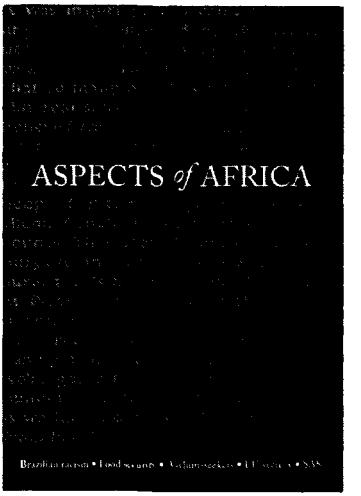

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(Continued from inside front cover)

"I assumed he was joking.

"'There is a Nobel Prize waiting for the economist who resurrects Marx and puts it all together,' he continued, quite seriously. 'I am absolutely convinced that Marx's approach is the best way to look at capitalism.'

"I didn't hide my astonishment. We had both studied economics during the early eighties at Oxford, where most of our teachers agreed with Keynes that Marx's economic theories were 'complicated hocus-pocus' and Communism was an 'insult to our intelligence.' ... Nonetheless I decided that if my host, with all his experience of global finance, reckoned Marx had something worthwhile to say, perhaps it was time to take a look."

So he did the rounds of second-hand bookstores and picked up what seems to have been a reasonably representative collection of Marx's writing and took them along with him as reading matter on his August vacation.

The result is the *New Yorker* article mentioned above. Why do we call it "sensational"? There are two reasons, both necessary to an explanation. First, because the author comes to his subject with an open mind and makes no effort to slide over or qualify the favorable opinion his inquiries led him to. The final sentence of the article makes his position clear: "His [Marx's] books will be worth reading as long as capitalism endures." Of how many authors can that honestly be said today? Second, the *New Yorker* had the courage to publish the article despite the obvious fact that it contradicts the all but unanimous conventional wisdom of the bourgeois media that Marx and Marxism died an ignominious death with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989-90. Announcing the "return of Marx" so soon after that even required courage. If you doubt it, just try to imagine the editors of, say, the *New York Times* Sunday magazine having to decide whether or not to publish Cassidy's article.

With respect to content, there is, not surprisingly, little in "The Return of Karl Marx" that is new or original. Cassidy speaks of the "failure of Communism" being a part of Marx's legacy, but immediately adds that "this was not his primary interest ... Marx was a student of capitalism, and that is how he should be judged." Quite so. Compared to most latter-day commentators on Marx's work, Cassidy is generally fair and accurate, a remarkable achievement in this day and age of debased and all too often shamefully dishonest ideological welfare. Obviously we disagree with some of what he says, but any one interested in improving, or just refreshing, his or her knowledge of what Marx and Marxism are all about could find a lot worse places to start then this *New Yorker* article. And if the implication of the title—that Marx is back and will be with us as long as we live in a capitalist society—is borne out by the course of history, the knowledge gained will be well worth having and adding to as opportunity offers and experience unfolds.

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